

In the matter of 1998 biennial Regulatory Review  
Amendment of Part 97 of the Commission's  
Amateur Service Rules,

FCC WT Docket 98-143.

Comments of:

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I John Marks file these comments on November 22, 1998 in the FCC matter of the 1998 biennial Regulatory Review--Amendment of Part 97 of the Commissions Amateur Service Rules, FCC WT Docket 98-143.

**Executive Summary:**

This letter is in reference to the Commission's "decision" to completely drop the Novice License Class. The present structure related to the Novice Entry Class is obviously not attractive to young or old. I disagree, however, that this is an automatic reason to drop the license class. I urge you to consider restructuring the *Novice License as an entry class for school-age students 16 yrs of age or younger. The 5 wpm test should remain. The written test should be greatly simplified with the younger student in mind. There should be no charge for the test, code privileges should be allowed on 80,40,30,17,15,10, and SSB on 10. VHF-UHF privileges should not be included.* Test preparation material should be developed by educators to support academic classroom application in the many areas that ham radio can augment learning.

**"THE MAGIC"**

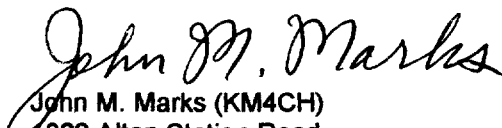
**Secretary Salas:**

I am a 46 year old Extra Class Ham from Kentucky. I have been licensed for over ten years. I am a member of the ARRL and a volunteer examiner. I am a field consultant for the KY-Department for Technical Education and an educator. This is my first time to express an official written opinion on any subject concerning amateur radio. I understand that you are requesting comments on the possibility of restructuring the Amateur Radio Licensing procedure. I understand that down-sizing and simplification are major trends in the times that we live. I realize that some of the reasons that the amateur radio service has prevailed for many years relate to it's ability to police itself, provide community service, and other support such as the V.E. program. We need to continue a system of issuing licensees that is fair, equitable, and challenging. The licensing structure has undergone several modifications over the years that have been more confusing then detrimental. I learned code at 5 wpm to, get my novice license. I worked 48 states as a novice and learned to appreciate code and code operators in the process. Novice enhancement allowed me to operate on 10 meters during the peak of the last sunspot cycle and I *did* really appreciate those phone privileges when they came along. The question pool, however, after "Novice Enhancement" became much more difficult and comprehensive. After I upgraded I got involved in the VE program and in teaching Ham Radio Classes. I and several other Ham Operators in the club at Madisonville, Ky. were privileged to see many people receive licenses. I never worked with a student who could not meet the requirements for becoming an operator. I met several who for one reason or another dropped out. But, this is not unusual in our society, over half of the folks who enter college drop out before completing their degree. I doesn't mean that they are dumb, or incapable of learning, it just means that they weren't ready to commit to the work necessary to complete a degree at that point in their lives. Likewise, Amateur radio. The learning of Morse code is just something that is unique to our hobby. Many of the code operators on the air today would not be enjoying that part of the hobby if they had not been required to learn it. Many other forks do not chose to use their code privileges and that's really OK too. Yes, perhaps code has outlived some of it's technical usefulness, but not all of it's worth. *The thing that drew me into this hobby was the mystique, the "real radios glow in the dark", the SOS in the middle of the night stuff. You know the "magic".* I have many friends who love computers, the internet, packet, etc. I think these things are great, but I really hope that these folks don't, in their zeal to "upgrade the Hobby" forget those of us who are in it for the "magic" Many things that are taught in college aren't used by everyone, but the accomplishment of learning has some worth. I have no problem with a simplified structure, but removing the code and including more difficult "technical questions" makes little sense. If there is one thing that the modern ham does less than "code operation" (as some contend), it would have to be working on and or building equipment. To make hams study radio theory and technical data in more depth in order to get licensed wouldn't accomplish anything.

In all the proposals mentioned to date, on thing is common, dropping the Novice License. I have been told by other Hams that dropping the Novice License is a "done deal". It doesn't seem that the ARRL is even arguing the point. The reason usually sighted is the number of hams using this entry class is low compared to no-code technician. *I would suggest that the present structure of the Novice license is defeating it's intended purpose.* I benefited greatly from being a Novice. The license class itself was very helpful to my learning. When I would unwittingly break into a contest QSO, and have someone slow down and work me, it was because they knew I was a *Novice*, and they wanted to help me learn as someone had helped them. I wasn't embarrassed to be on the radio with little in the way of operating skills because I was a *Novice*. It was OK. It was my rookie year! We all have to start somewhere. *In fact your first stab at anything is your Novice attempt, whether you admit it or not.* In our quest to "get more people in the hobby" we have increased, reduced, dropped, changed ourselves to death. What about "keeping them when you get them" I am still in the hobby because I have met some really great Elmers who showed me genuine help and patience. I have seen the rise and fall of no-code. No there isn't anything really wrong with that license class except I really don't think they are sticking. The VHF repeaters are more and more silent; cell phones are more dependable. Packet is on the wane; the internet is more dependable. A few of the curious and impatient want the rules changed so they can try out some of that HF stuff. But I'm afraid when they do, it will just look like an international "chat room" of some sort to them. Did you ever try to explain your hobby to a non-ham, you know that blank look you often get.... they haven't been enchanted by the smell of ozone, or the thrill of talking in another language, or the warmth of a rig at night. Many never will. And that's OK too. I can assure those that are looking to get more folks into the hobby or sell more radio's by continually making it an easy thing to grasp, will have a short lived boom. I don't spend any time on CB radio or Internet chat rooms because many of the people that use them have little invested ( of themselves) and little to lose....anonymity does not always bring out the best in us does it?

I have an 8 year old son who is now studying to get his ham license. Code was not hard for him to learn. The theory questions, however are tough for someone that age. I see why very few people are entering by that route. Someone my age can just memorize the questions and get no code tech which gets one on the two meter band and the initial attraction to VHF. Kids can master the code easily, and in fact find it intriguing, but the questions on the novice portion of the exam are tough for these little guys. **I really think that we need an entry class just for kids. Lets make a true Novice license for kids under 16. A 5 wpm code test and a simplified question pool written so they can understand. Give them code privileges on 80 and 40 and 30 and 17 and 15 and 10. Give them voice on 10.** ( removing the VHF-UHF stuff in this class would help to greatly simplify the test) Lets make an HF Novice class that retains all the "magic". All the tedious questions about repeater control and Amtor and satellite communication could be moved to the technician question pool. No-code techs would still have to answer all these. I contend that children today are already too technically savvy with computers to be wowed by packet or two meters anyway. Anytime I operate a station for Jamboree on the Air or a middle school career day, *HF is the thing that interests them.* They think 2 meters is just some kind of cell phone or beeper; packet looks like E-Mail. *Listening to and sending code is totally new and exciting to them.* Why don't we fully develop all the teaching aspects of geography, language, math, science, etc. through carefully focused educational materials for elementary, middle, and high - schoolers. This would be an angle that we are not fully utilizing. The "super-duper technical" stuff is a tough area to compete in. Besides, ham radio is really more about people than computers anyway. I really think that if we did this we would be building a real future for this hobby. A hobby that has been a great one for so many for so long. There is just a certain feel, or touch, or smell that comes from the real thing - that humans like. Kids still like playing real baseball more than cyber-baseball. Even today, any new Ham that makes his or her first contact on HF CW knows something about what Marconi experienced when he heard that first transatlantic transmission. I know how he felt, he felt just like a kid again! If we're going to make anything easier, let's make it easier for more young folks who still believe in "magic" to experience it.

Submitted by:

  
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